

**Missouri Assessment Program**

**Communications Arts  
Practice Test**

**Grade 7**

**Student's Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print first name and last name)

**Teacher's Name** \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print first name and last name)

**School District** \_\_\_\_\_

**Building/Room** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Form 27**

**Do not open test booklet until instructed to do so.**

# *The Language of Horses*

By Monty Roberts

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*In the passage, Monty Roberts describes to readers how he learned to communicate fluently with wild horses.*

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My father, a traditional horseman, was a tough authoritarian. He used intimidation and brutality to “break” horses to his will. Unfortunately, he used the same methods on me. At eight years old, after witnessing a particularly vicious example of my father’s methods, I vowed that my life would be different. I would use communication, not violence, to enlist the cooperation of the horses I trained. I was sure that horses had a language, and if I could speak that language, I could train horses in a new and entirely different way. So it was at the age of eight that I set a life goal for myself—to be able to communicate fluently with horses.

My father thought this idea was nonsense, so I had to pursue my goal without his help. My mother supported me, but secretly, for she also feared my father’s anger. We lived on a horse facility in Salinas, California, at the time, and I spent every waking hour trying to communicate with the untamed domestic horses on the facility.

The summer I was thirteen, I went to Nevada for three weeks for a job. I had been hired to capture wild mustangs. This was the first opportunity I’d had to work with totally wild horses. Determined to make the best use of my time, I rose early each day and rode a long way into the desert, where I used binoculars to study the habits of the mustang herds that lived there.

I was utterly spellbound by these horses. I would sit for hours and hours, watching those beautiful animals as they ran, grazed and played in the wide spaces of the desert.

What astonished me most was how the wild horses communicated with each other. They rarely used sounds; instead, they used a complex language of motion. The position of their bodies, and the speed and direction

of their travel were the key elements of their language. And by varying the degree of rigidity or relaxation in the eyes, ears, neck, head and position of the spine, a horse could signal anything it needed to communicate.

As I watched, I thought: *Could I convince a wild horse to let me get close enough to touch him without him running away?*

For easy spotting, I picked a horse with unique markings, and tried to herd him away from the others. For many days I tried every way I could think of to get near him, but he always sensed me and he was off before I was even close. One day, I got lucky and came up behind him in a small canyon. At last, I had his full attention. Then, using only my body to convey the signals I’d seen the horses use with each other, I persuaded the wary stallion to stand still. He watched me silently as I moved closer and closer. He was watchful, but he wasn’t afraid. Not breathing, I took the step that brought me within an arm’s reach of him. I avoided his eyes as I stretched my hand toward him and laid it softly on his neck. It lasted only a few seconds, but it was enough. I watched him gallop away, my chest exploding with joy. I had communicated with a horse!

When I returned home, I was bursting with excitement and told my mother what had happened in the desert with the mustang. While I could see that she was happy for me, all she said was that I must never speak of it to my father or anyone else, or I would get in trouble. I felt let down, but I knew she was right. My desire to learn to communicate with horses became a deep inner passion that I fiercely hid from the rest of the world.

Unable to share what was most important to me with anyone, I was almost

always alone, except for the horses. The only thing that mattered to me was my life's dream.

Every summer, I returned to Nevada for three weeks to work, continuing my research in the desert. Four years later, when I was seventeen, I progressed so far that I not only touched a wild mustang, I saddled, bridled and rode one without once using any pain or intimidation to do so. Proudly, I rode the wild horse back to the ranch. The ranch hands who saw me ride in called me a liar when I told them what I'd done. They ridiculed me and insisted the horse I rode must once have been a domesticated horse who had run away and ended up with the mustangs. Deeply hurt, I realized the futility of my dreams. With no one to believe in me, it was *my* spirit that was broken.

I eventually got over the pain of that devastating humiliation and decided to continue my training methods, but I vowed I would never again tell anyone what I did.

And so I became a horse trainer. I used my experiences with every horse I worked with to learn more and more about the language of horses. It was a slow but satisfying education.

Once, when I was about twenty-five, a family hired me to tackle the problem of their mare, My Blue Heaven. She was a

beautiful horse, intelligent and extremely talented. But during her training, a previous owner had inadvertently mishandled her and she had developed a serious problem: She wouldn't stop. She would blast away like a rocket and refuse to be halted—crashing through fences, and slipping and sliding as she made dangerously sharp turns. She was diabolically treacherous. A short time earlier, the mare had almost killed the present owner's daughter. The family was going on vacation and they asked me to sell the horse for them for whatever I could get for her. They had heard I was good with difficult horses and they knew in order to sell her, someone would have to be able to bring her to a stop from a run. No one else was willing to try.

She was the most dangerous horse I have ever seen, but I used everything I had absorbed over the years to help her. Moving slowly and keeping my communication with her to just the basics, I earned her trust. Building on that trust, I continued to communicate with her, and soon she melted. Our progress was swift and remarkable from that point on. It had seemed impossible, but within a few days, she was transformed.

While the owners were still away, I showed her in a competition and she took first place.

## *The Language of Horses*

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1. In the passage, both the author and his father train horses. Use details from the passage to explain the methods used by both the author and his father.

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2. In one sentence, state the main idea of the passage.

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## *The Language of Horses*

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3. Is “The Language of Horses” an appropriate title for the passage? Use two details from the passage to explain why or why not.

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4. What is the most important event in “The Language of Horses”? Use two details from the passage to explain why you believe this to be the most important event.

Most important event:

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Explanation:

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## *The Language of Horses*

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### **Alternate Constructed-Response Item**

Explain what the author means by this sentence: “The only thing that mattered to me was my life’s dream.” Support your response using two details and/or examples from the passage or from your personal experience.

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### **Circle the letter of the correct answer for Questions 5 and 6.**

5. At one point in the passage, the narrator says, “I was utterly spellbound by these horses. I would sit for hours and hours, watching those beautiful animals as they ran, grazed and played in the wide spaces of the desert.”

Which word means nearly the same thing as “spellbound”?

- A. confused
  - B. fascinated
  - C. frustrated
  - D. surprised
6. Which is the best summary of the narrator’s experience with the mare, My Blue Heaven?
- A. Through his communication method, he earned the trust of a dangerous horse.
  - B. Because he could not communicate with her, he had to sell her.
  - C. When the mare killed the owner’s daughter, he had to put her to sleep.
  - D. He was so successful with her that she won the Kentucky Derby.

## *The Language of Horses*

7. Now you will write a paper in response to a writing prompt. First, read the prompt in the box below.

You will now have 45 minutes for your prewriting activities such as brainstorming, listing, outlining, and writing a rough draft. Use the pages in the test booklet labeled “prewriting” to record your ideas and your rough draft.

You will then have another 45 minutes in which to write your final paper. Use the pages in the test booklet labeled “final paper” to record your completed work.

**In “The Language of Horses,” the author accomplished an important personal goal. Write a paper for your teacher in which you explain the qualities needed to achieve a personal goal.**

## Prewriting

[illegible]

## Prewriting

[illegible]

## Prewriting

[illegible]

## Prewriting

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## Prewriting

[illegible]

## Final Paper

[illegible]

## Final Paper

[illegible]

## Final Paper

[illegible]

## Final Paper

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